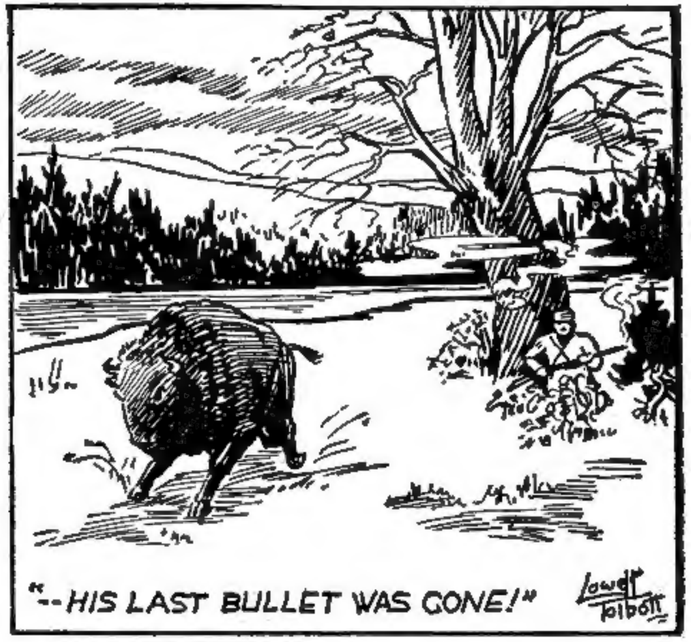
Facing Starvation

By TALBOTT and FORTNEY



To survive in the wilderness inhabited only by themselves and the fragments of Indian tribes, the Pringle brothers knew they would have to obtain a new supply of powder and lead, and long miles lay between them and civilization.

The two brothers stood under the boughs of the giant sycamore, hesitating to say goodbye to one another, for flet they would never meet again. Hardly recovered from his weakened condition as the result of his almost fatal fight with a bear some weeks earlier, Samuel Pringle knew that he could not make the trip with his brother. He would have to wait at their wilderness home many days for John's return.

They divided the four remaining bullets, each taking two. As John disappeared across the creek that was later named Turkey Run, Sam wondered is he would ever see him again. Before separating, they had agreed that Sam should cut notches on a small bush near the tree's entrance if he found he was going to die of starvation or sickness, but if he should be taken away by Indians, there would be only one notch, or none.

For many days Samuel waited patiently for the return of his brother, long after the date set for his return. He saved his last two shots until his food was gone. He searched the woods for nuts and berries, but that particular year there was a scarcity of this natural supply. Finally he decided to risk a shot to try and bring down a deer or a buffalo—before he became so weakened from hunger that he could not go on the hunt.

He stalked a large buck, aimed—but he must have been nervous. The aim was high. Now only one shot remained.

Before risking it however, he taxed his mind for some other method of obtaining food. From a thorn, he fashioned a fishook, stripped a "line" from the bark of a hickory sapling, and tried his luck, using black crickets for bait. A long day netted him only one trout. He would have to use his last shot!

Every care was taken to creep up on a grazing buffalo. Within five paces . . . he dares not venture nearer. Now, when he needed a steady nerve most, his shaking hands made the sights of his muzzle-loader dance. But he must not wait. A loud crack and a puff of smoke told him that his last bullet was gone!

NEXT WEEK: PANTHER'S PREY

How long he lay on his couch of skins, weak and fevered—almost delirious—Samuel Pringle did not know. In his semi-conscious state, fleeting pictures of the past crossed his mind. Again he set out into the wilderness from Fort Pitt, leaving the British army and civilization behind; he crept slowly through dense thickets to avoid disturbing hostile Indians; again he felt the breath of a great bear in his face, ready to crush him in its vice-like jaws; he lived through ages without food, fighting to hold his grip on life; he haw his brother returning, after being away many moons too long—but it must be a dream. He stirred uneasily, awakening to the realization that he was still alone.

Far out in the night he heard the call of a solitary wolf, but the sound did not disturb him. Again is came, then repeated. There was something familiar about the sound—something different from the howl of the average wolf. Then he knew! It was John, coming back to him, after many weeks—after he had resigned himself to fate—waiting death.

By the time his brother stood at the opening of the tree, Sam was unable to greet him. The sudden excitement was too much, and he sank to the ground, unconscious.

Three weeks passed before Samuel regained sufficient strength to leave his bunk. In the meantime, he learned that the French and Indian War was over, and that the men were free to return to the settlement. Yet with their safety assured, the men were reluctant to leave the Buckhannon Valley, and the sycamore tree that was their nome. Now, after nearly 170 years, the spot where the tree grew is marked with a monument erected by the D. A. R. Society.

After winter had passed, the Pringle brothers went back to the East, telling of the beauties and other promising features of their new-found country.

The result was that a party of adventurous pioneers was soon pushing westward—to the Valley of the Buckhannon—headed by Samuel Pringle. History tells little of the later life of John Pringle, but it is believed he went into the area that is now Kentucky. Samuel, however, was determined to spend the remainder of his days in the new land that is now Upshur County. His party first camped under the sycamore tree, June 20, 1768, 169 years ago, becoming the first permanent settlers in that part of Virginia. Thus, although there was much yet to be done, the Pringle brothers had accomplished a task justly placing them in West Virginia's Hall of Fame.—The End.

NEXT WEEK: BETTY ZANE